

Child and Family Services Update

March 17, 2003

Safe Refueling Alert

Submitted by Douglas Call

Mobile Phone Safety

The Shell Oil Company recently issued a warning after three incidents in which mobile phones (cell phones) ignited fumes during fueling operations. In the first case, the phone was placed on the car's trunk lid during fueling; it rang and the ensuing fire destroyed the car and the gasoline pump. In the second case, an individual suffered severe burns to their face when fumes ignited as they answered a call while refueling their car. And in the third case, an individual suffered burns to the thigh and groin as fumes ignited when the phone, which was in their pocket, rang while they were fueling their car.

You should know that:

- Mobile phones can ignite fuel or fumes.
- Mobile phones that light up when switched on or when they ring release enough energy to provide a spark for ignition
- Mobile phones should not be used in filling stations or when fueling lawn mowers, boats, etc.
- Mobile phones should not be used, or should be turned off, around other materials that generate flammable or explosive fumes or dust (i.e., solvents, chemicals, gases, grain dust, etc.).

Static Electricity

There's another safety warning you should know about concerning static electricity. Below is information from an email from Pat Cabiling who works at Chevron Texaco's Richmond Refinery.

Bob Renkes of The Petroleum Equipment Institute is working on a campaign to try and make people aware of fires as a result of "static electricity" at gas pumps. His company has researched 150 cases of these fires. His results were very surprising:

- Out of 150 cases, almost all of them were women.
- Almost all cases involved the person getting back in their vehicle while the nozzle was still pumping gas, then when finished they went back to pull the nozzle out and the fire started as a result of static electricity.
- Most had on rubber-soled shoes.
- Most men never get back in their vehicle until completely finished. This is why they are seldom involved in these types of fires.
- It is the vapors that come out of the gas that cause the fire when connected with static charges.

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- There were 29 fires where the vehicle was re-entered and the nozzle was touched during refueling from a variety of makes and models - some resulting in extensive damage to the vehicle, to the station, and to the customer.
- Seventeen fires occurred before, during, or immediately after the gas cap was removed and before fueling began.

Mr. Renkes stresses to NEVER get back into your vehicle while filling it with gas. If you absolutely HAVE to get in your vehicle while the gas is pumping, make sure you get out and close the door TOUCHING THE METAL, before you ever pull the nozzle out. This way the static electricity from your body will be discharged before you ever remove the nozzle.

Four Rules for Safe Refueling

To sum it up, here are the Four Rules for Safe Refueling:

- Turn your off engine.
- Do not smoke.
- Do not use your cell phone - leave it inside the vehicle or turn it off.
- Do not re-enter your vehicle during fueling.

As mentioned earlier, The Petroleum Equipment Institute, along with several other companies, are trying to make the public aware of this danger. You can find out more information by going to <http://www.pei.org/>. Once there, click in the center of the screen where it says "Stop Static."

Please share this information with ALL of your family and friends, especially those who have children in the car with them while pumping gas. If this were to happen to them, they may not be able to get their children out in time.